

**Remarks of H.E. Dr. Bassem Awadallah
Minister of Finance
of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan**

**Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
19 April 2005**

Mr. Chairman,

1. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you my thoughts on educational reform in the Middle East, the nexus between education and terrorism, and our efforts in Jordan to place education at the center of the reform and development agenda. To be sure, the Middle East is faced with the immense challenge of its demographic trends: by 2010 some 146 million workers will seek employment, 185 million by 2020. With unemployment rates now at about 15%, the ambitious goal of absorbing unemployed workers in addition to the new job entrants implies the need to create close to 50 million jobs in the coming 5 years and 100 million jobs by 2020; that is, doubling the current level of employment within the first two decades of this century.
2. But within this stark statistic lies the hope of regional renaissance. Regardless of natural resource endowment, the future of the region will hinge on its ability to harness its human potential. Human resources, nurtured and provided with the opportunity to produce and innovate is the only way towards closing the knowledge and development gap that currently exists.
3. Hatred, bigotry, and violence are not caused by the lack of access to knowledge, but rather by the lack of opportunity. And education is central in allowing people to seek opportunity.
4. Education must reflect a culture, a distinct understanding of the role of the individual and that of society. Closed societies with a reference point long lost in the past cannot teach knowledge as culture, but rather teach dogma as truism.
5. This, Mr. Chairman, should be, in my modest opinion, the starting point and driver for any educational reform effort in the region. The central role that education plays is not lost on anyone in the region – we live in young societies that yearn for it, whether through popular culture, media, or how we used to do it when I was in school, through reading.
6. Terror and ideology are taught as doctrine in many places around the world. But helping build schools and pay for more teachers is not the solution - it is part of it though. The solution is the creation of an incentive-based system of assistance, particularly in education, in which countries modernizing their educational systems, encouraging creative thinking, problem solving, and trusting their students to make their own judgments about what is right and wrong are assisted.
7. There are three principal difficulties that challenge education in East Asia today: (i) the poor quality of basic education; (ii) limited access to educational opportunities, especially for girls; and (iii) the inadequate relevance to economic, social, and health needs.

- 8.** For our part in Jordan, the primacy of education in our development process has long been established, and we have long sought to invest heavily in our youth. The focus of Jordan's human resource development covers wide-ranging activities including public and higher education, vocational and technical training, and youth development. We find a pressing need to incorporate enhanced levels of student learning capabilities to include analytical skills, team-based activity, and computer literacy at every stage of the education system, enabling citizens to become increasingly highly educated, broadly skilled, adaptable, and motivated.
- 9.** This has been carried out through a five year comprehensive program (2003-2008) at a cost of US\$380: the Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy program (ERfKE), devised in close coordination with the World Bank and other donors. It sets out a coordinated and integrated plan of action to meet the current and future needs of society in Jordan in the context of the knowledge economy. That is, relevant knowledge, adequate physical environments, and an environment in which students can discover, absorb, and contemplate values, thoughts, and knowledge.
- 10.** Since 2002, more than US\$180 million have been channeled in human resource development, 39% of which was provided by the U.S. (US\$70.6 million). Double shifts have been phased-out in almost all schools, about 180 schools are being established, 140 kindergartens have been established, 650 science laboratories were built and equipped, while more than 500 schools have already been computerized, resulting in the ratio of students to personal computers decreasing from 42 to 16. Further, 14 new vocational training centers have been established, and 8,000 people have received, or are currently receiving, increasingly demand-driven training.
- 11.** Today, Jordan ranks 51st of 127 countries (and first among Arab states) in UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) Development Index (measuring primary enrollment rates, adult literacy rates, gender specific EFA, and survival rate to grade five).
- 12.** The Middle East region today is home to 130 million children who constitute 50% of the population. While most governments have made tremendous strides toward extending access to basic education to all children, the region is characterized by great underlying variation at the country level. For example, Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia have achieved near universal enrollment, while literacy in Morocco is less than 40%. Similarly, access to education continues to be uneven across the population.
- 13.** Clearly much more needs to be done. USAID investments in education in the region of US\$43 in 2003 are not sufficient. Educational reform will continue to occupy center-stage, and we cannot but start with our young to lead a comprehensive national renaissance. Schools still need to be built, old curricula need to be revised, new e-curricula needs to be developed, and youth need to be trained with relevant skills. They must be provided with the tools necessary to lead productive and fulfilling lives.
- 14.** Within the framework of change to meet the economic needs of the future, and given the similarities and differences between countries of the region, there are a number of success stories that could be replicated through adaptation and modification in other locations and countries in the region. Given the pressing need to improve education and training, and given the scarcity of resources, it is important for all countries to consider what the necessary changes are, what approaches to change can be employed and how sustainable

change can be achieved. We have much to learn from each other through discussion, sharing of ideas, debate, and application.

15. At the heart of any modernization plans in the region must be a review of the educational systems and a discussion of the modalities for reshaping them into true vehicles for advancement. Knowledge societies that cherish innovation and scholarship are the bedrock of development. The region's history of innovation is indeed a suitable backdrop for discussion, and a true revival of this tradition lies at the heart of a meeting of education ministers from the Middle East and the G8.
16. A renewed faith in partnership and shared interests is the main impetus for the meeting. This process was launched at the Forum for the Future meeting in Rabat, Morocco, in December 2004, where Jordan outlined its suggestions for cooperation between the G8 and BMENA countries in educational reform.
17. In a preparatory meeting held in London in February 2004, Jordan presented the following areas as what it expects will be the outcomes that will emerge from the ministerial meeting on education:
 - a. A renewed commitment by countries of the BMENA region to initiate and pursue homegrown and credible educational reform initiatives.
 - b. A clear and practical framework of action based on technical consultations to explore the mechanisms of implementing educational reforms. This is to be reviewed and vetted at the Forum for the Future meeting in Bahrain in November 2005.
 - c. A commitment by countries of the G8 to render support (financial, technical, and political) to the educational reform efforts in the region.
18. Agreement has been reached on the agenda for the ministerial to tackle four main agenda items, as follows:-

Agenda item I: Critical success factors for educational reform

- a. Political commitment.
- b. Financial commitment (importance of budgetary transparency and access to resources).
- c. Building on best practices.
- d. System-wide governance.
- e. Monitoring and evaluation.
- f. Partnership with schools, parents, civil society, business, and donors.
- g. Systemic approach to reform.

Agenda item II: Literacy and access

- a. Support and commit to the framework of action to halve illiteracy as agreed upon in the Literacy Workshop to be held in Algeria in April 2005 (agreement on regional program).
- b. Support for regional and national plans to enhance access to and participation in education.
- c. Develop mechanisms for lifelong learning and out-of-school children.

Agenda item III: Equity and social inclusion

- a. Innovative uses of ICT in special education programs.
- b. Specialized outreach programs for disadvantaged students.

- c. Mechanisms to provide equal opportunities for girls and people in need.
- d. Inclusive models of schooling.

Agenda item IV: Quality of education

- a. Curricula renewal that maintains national identities and respects cultural particularities while facilitating modernization and development.
- b. E-content development.
- c. Quality assurance at all levels based on international standards and benchmarks.
- d. Occupational standards to ensure quality and facilitate labor mobility.
- e. Skills-based pedagogy backed by support for efficient professional development programs.

- 19.** The ministerial meeting on education will take place in the period 22-23 May 2005, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum meeting. Given the wide participation of the private sector and civil society, the ministerial meeting on education will have a rich pool to draw upon in its consultations.
- 20.** On 22 May 2005, a sub-cabinet meeting on education will be held, in which roundtables will be formed to discuss each of the four agenda items outlined above. Each roundtable will include representatives from BMENA and G8 countries, as well as representatives from the private sector and civil society organizations. Discussions will aim at producing a framework for action within each agenda item. The resulting frameworks for action will then be collated into a general framework that will be presented the following day for the ministerial meeting. The ministerial meeting will then review and discuss the document, with the aim of reaching an agreement on the framework by the end of the day, and will be making an announcement to that effect.
- 21.** The support of the G8 to the reform efforts of countries in the region is instrumental in their timely implementation and in ensuring their success. With the realization that regional reforms that reflect the realities of the region and address the fears of the people and the deficiencies of the existing systems are undoubtedly necessary, the G8 countries have much to contribute, in both expertise and resources. Education is no exception.

Thank you very much.